

A Question Of Faith: #2 - Can you be a Christian AND a Scientist?

Psalm 104:1-24

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Some time ago I had a conversation with a young woman – we'll call her Dana. Dana was a thinker and loved to challenge conventional wisdom. She was wondering about what it takes to get to heaven. The view in her community was that you had to make a clear commitment to Jesus as your admission ticket. And she challenged that. “Because,” she said, “little babies can't make a commitment like that. Do you mean to say they all go to hell?”

Well, the group she was part of grew quiet. And the leader was clearly uncomfortable with this challenging question and mumbled something about not doubting God's Word and having to simply accept His ways because they are higher than ours..... and then changed gears in the group's conversation.

That flipped a switch in Dana's thinking – and she began to slide towards the edge, and eventually out the door of the church.

Dana is like many people. Some who have been reprimanded, or even publicly ridiculed for daring to challenge conventional wisdom. Drew Dyck wrote an article entitled “*The Leavers*” in Christianity Today (Nov 2010), and found that the majority of those who leave the church in their 20's or 30's will cite, as one of the compelling reasons, the way that church leaders responded to their questions and doubts.

I pray that when we face spiritual questions that we will see it not as something threatening, something to be shut down, something that is a sign of weakness – but instead as a sign of honest spiritual seeking.

One of the best things we can do is ask the questioner more questions, explore with them the boundaries of their wondering.

Nothing wrong with questions.

Truly.

The hardest questions, of course, are ones that strike at the core of who we are and what we believe. And sometimes, yes sometimes, the questions will be on subjects we've not considered ourselves. In which case, please, let's not see it as a threat. But, instead, an opportunity to wonder together; an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to move in the mysterious way that He so beautifully does; an opportunity for new spiritual openness to develop.

We could brush off the question.

We could malign the questioner.

Instead, let's adopt the posture of 1 Peter 3:15:

In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...

Gentleness and respect.

It is very respectful to say, “you know, that's a good question. I'm not really sure about the answer. But let's dig into it together, and see what we find.”

Shutting someone down, or ridiculing them, because I feel personally threatened, or because I don't have the answer, **isn't** gentle or respectful. It's not the Biblical approach.

Now, it's not just Christians who struggle with this. Contemporary liberalism struggles, too. There have been a series of articles recently in *The Week*, an American news journal, talking about the intolerance of once-tolerant liberalism. There are more and more voices trying to publicly silence any who take differing positions on major issues than the contemporary liberal stance.... on whatever that is – gay rights, marriage, abortion, medical care, immigration policy, military intervention in the Middle East... you name it.

Nonetheless, just because others do this is no reason we should.

And so I hope and pray that as we continue with our series “*A Question Of Faith*” that we will be very deliberate in cultivating an attitude that shares the love and grace of Jesus with all those God puts in our path.... including those who ask lots of questions.

I pray also that we will be a congregation that is OK with having stuff about which we choose to disagree. And that we will harbour a generous grace that allows people of a variety of opinions to linger within this community. And that we really ARE ok with saying, “I'm not sure.”

Can we do that?

Even when faced with challenging questions?

Like the one we've got today – perhaps not the most explosive, but yet one that, my experience anyway, is a very real issue for particularly the younger ones among us.....

Can you be a Christian AND a scientist?

There are many who would argue, “NO.”

Both within, and outside of, the Church.

Those of you in high school will certainly face the “NO” answer from teachers and classmates.

Many social commentators will tell you the same thing.

Here inside the community of faith I've encountered my fair share of suspicion – people who call their children to not study science because it is the realm of godless unbelief and heresy.

Come with me to Psalm 104, which I'd like to read with you as our gateway into thinking about this question -

Can you be a Christian AND a Scientist?

As we read Psalm 104, please see if you can detect the **worldview** of the author.

In other words, how does the writer see God connecting to the world?

Is God active, or passive?

Present or distant?

Controlling or weak?

So..... how does the writer see God connecting to the world?
What's his worldview?

Answer – Psalm 104 presents us with a God who is present in Creation, interested in all that goes on, has His divine hands on the controls, has the power to direct all things, and the interest to do so.

Psalm 104 suggests that the meeting of tectonic plates that push up mountain ranges happens under the careful watch and controlling hand of God.

That the seasons progress, planets continue in their orbits and rotations on their axis... all because God commands and directs it to be so.

That the beans and corn grow in the field – give thanks to God for it.

It's not just a fluke. And it's not just because that's mechanically, biologically, genetically how things happen.

The bible's worldview is of a Creator that is intensely interested and involved in his Creation. He has a “hands-on” policy. You'll see this worldview displayed most clearly in the worship songbook of the Bible, *Psalms*. But it is the bedrock view of reality that holds up every other page in Scripture, too.

I hope it is the foundation of your worldview, too. Shaping how you live, how you play, and how you pray.

It is this worldview that calls us back here tomorrow morning for our Thanksgiving Day service. Hope to see you there.

Don't think, though, that everyone around shares that worldview, though.
And the worldview that these good folks will hold fundamentally shapes their answer to the question,

Can you be a Christian AND a scientist?

The worldview of Psalm 104 says, “**Yes, you can be a Christian and a scientist!**”

For science – understood as the field of learning that studies the world and how it tends to behave, and then puts forward theories of how these things work –

science becomes the field of study that explores the ongoing, active, orderly working of God in Creation.... how he has designed it all to be and function and continue.

Science is, in this worldview, a celebration of the awesome creative genius of the Creator. And his magnificent life-giving present power.

This is the view of Dr. Francis Collins, former head of Human Genome Project and now head of the American National Institute of Health.

He believes that the fine-tuning, beauty and order of nature points directly to a divine Creator, and in his book *The Language Of God* describes his conversion from atheism to Christianity.

(read his testimony: <http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/04/03/collins.commentary/>)

This also the approach of astronomer Dr. Deborah Haarsma. She recently edited a volume of 14 essays by scientists in which they describe how their faith and professions

intersect and how they give glory to God through it. It's called *Delight In Creation*. Worth buying and reading! Dr Haarsma references Psalm 104 frequently in her lectures.

Professor John Lennox, in an article in *The Daily Mail* a few years ago said, "For me, as a Christian believer, the beauty of the scientific laws only reinforces my faith in an intelligent, divine creative force at work. The more I understand science, the more I believe in God because of my wonder at the breadth, sophistication and integrity of his creation."

He says "Amen!" to Psalm 104.

Walter Hearn's book, *Being A Christian In Science*, is also worth reading and shares a similar, Psalm 104-based world view.

Hearn reminds us that a science is a way to understand the natural world by observing, experimenting, and then attempting to find cause and effect relationships.

Scientists are fascinated by the world around them. They long to understand more than what we already know about this complex and intricately connected world.

A scientist knows we have few of the answers, and he or she sets out to at least try to ask the right questions so that we can learn more about how things work, and how this amazing world fits together in all its diversity.

Scientists search, study, build theories, and as they find more and more evidence that supports a certain theory, they'll begin to depend on it to build further theories. That approach has given us nuclear energy and medical imaging technology and the internet. All great stuff.

But scientists also hold their theories with an open hand, aware that further questioning and study and exploration may force them to re-examine even their most basic principles.

Kids – if you are curious about nature, love to explore and wonder and are willing do a lot of hard work, then maybe a career in science is just the thing for you! It'll be a challenge – but a wonderful one.

Don't be afraid of science, or the lab. Ever.

And know that you CAN do this and be a Christian at the same time.

Just – please do be aware that there will be those who get into your face and say to you, "*No – you CANNOT be a scientist and a Christian.*"

I know – because I studied with a whole bunch of them.

Though back then, in the dark ages of dinosaurs, when dirt was still clean and I was in university, people didn't talk about it as loudly or as aggressively as they do today.

What you hear – quietly back in the 1970's, and rather aggressively today - is that science is about exploring the world without preconceived notions. Believing in God is a preconceived notion. Therefore, you must leave him out of it. There can be no room for God in the laboratory. The world just **IS** – accept that, and get on with the business of sharing theories of what that **IS** looks like.

What you will hear from people like Dr. Steven Hawking is that the laws of physics, not the will of God, provide the real explanation as to how life on Earth came into being. The Big Bang, Hawking argues, was the inevitable consequence of these laws of physics. He writes, 'because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself'

from nothing.'

It all sounds wonderful and new, and today's New Atheists with all their boldness and current popularity make it seem like a contemporary discovery.

Now – some of you listening to this, either here this morning, or on our podcast – might well hold to this view. And you'll have many scientists in your corner. And I respect your right to hold your position. What I would ask you to remember, though, is that your point of view is not new. It is not a result of the scientific discoveries of the last 200 years. It is, frankly, a worldview that's been around for thousands of years.

Steven Hawking wants us to believe we are nothing but a random collection of molecules, the end product of a mindless process. Ancient Greeks would recognize that idea. "Oh," they'd say. "*That's what the philosopher Epicurus proposed, and what the Roman poet Lucretius has been talking about.*"

There may be a deity somewhere, said Epicurus. But he's not interested in the world, never interferes with the world.... ever.

Life as we experience it, taught Epicurus, is just the result of the random collision of atoms. So, don't be fretting about an afterlife. Just live as best you can, live moderately – Go! Get on with it!

Atoms just randomly colliding, swerving sometimes, producing more complex forms of life in random patterns. No god involved. And life as we know it eventually develops.

Does that sound familiar? It should! Because that's the basis of evolutionary theory – be it biological, or social or political – grows out of Epicurean thinking.

Dr. N.T. Wright in his wonderful little book *Surprised By Scripture*, describes this all in way more detail than I can do today. I'd encourage you to download and read it if you want to chase it further.

All I want to get across today is that the study of Science is, in no way, dependent upon that worldview.... it doesn't hinge on rejecting Psalm 104.

You may, of course, study science from that point of view.

But you don't have to!

Doing so is a choice you make – a choice based on your worldview; a worldview that existed before science as we know it today existed.

One more thing – choosing your worldview matters, big time!

The choice you make has real consequences – not just eternally.... I'm not pulling the "heaven or hell" card right now.

Just think about life as we experience it.

Can we agree that science, in and of itself, isn't the answer to everything?

One quick example: There is no scientific way to understand the difference between right and wrong. You HAVE to go back to your worldview – whichever one you've chose.

You see, if we insist on that, that an atheistic scientism worldview is the only possibility, well - the only logical way I can see forward is then believing that we are all selfish beings, totally concerned with our own survival and happiness. If life really is all

about a god-free survival of the fittest, well – that opens up some pretty depressing possibilities, including the controversial one that the only thing Hitler did wrong..... was lose.

Please don't slam me right away for saying that – think about it.

No god – then no ultimate right or wrong. There's only what is. And no eternal value to it. That's what Epicurus taught. Is that what you want to believe?

Not me!

There are other questions, of course.

Like what do you do with all the stuff of miracles?

Or how do you read Genesis 1 &2?

Do you HAVE to accept a 7 24-hour day version of Creation?

Which is stuff for another message. We considered these questions last fall in our series, *Speedbumps On The Road of Faith*. Scroll back to September 30, 2013 and you'll find the podcast, study notes, and some extra thoughts posted at PastorKensNotes.Com